RECORDS MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

Naming conventions for electronic documents

What are naming conventions?

Naming conventions help you to create understandable, consistent and predictable names for electronic documents.

Should I use naming conventions?

If you answer 'Yes' to any of the following questions you should consider using naming conventions:

- Are you creating or working with electronic documents?

- Are you saving to or retrieving documents from a shared drive?

- Do you have difficulty understanding the names of electronic documents?

- Have you opened a folder and found that the document names gave no indication of what they contained and then opened the documents one by one in the hope of finding those you wanted?

- Have you ever given the same name to two documents and then found that you had accidentally deleted and replaced the earlier document?

- Do you need to group related documents together?

Using naming conventions will enable you to:

- Create understandable, consistent and predictable names for electronic documents.

- Easily distinguish electronic documents from one another.

- Sort documents in a predetermined logical sequence.

- Interpret file names without needing to refer to the file name creator.

- Group related documents together.

Must I use the naming conventions in this document?

You are not obliged to follow the naming conventions in this document. If however you answered 'Yes' to any of the questions above it may be helpful to do so.

Should you already have some naming conventions in place that enable you and others to create understandable, consistent and predictable names for electronic documents then the conventions in this document may still be of use to you and others.

What are the naming conventions?

1. [Use alpha and numeric characters only](#)

2. [File names should be unique](#)

3. [File names should be clear and concise](#)

4. [Demarcate words with CapitaLetters](#)

5. [Avoid repetition and redundancy](#)

6. [Give dates back to front e.g. YYYYMMDD](#)

7. [Use two-digit numbers (unless a date or a number with more than two digits)](#)

8. [Family name then initials](#)

9. [Link segmented documents by including e.g. 'Part01', 'Chapter01', etc.](#)

10. [Include version numbers and, where appropriate, 'Draft' or 'Final'](#)

11. [File names of correspondence should include the name of the correspondent, subject description, date sent or received, and if received, 'rcvd'](#)

12. [File names of attachments should include the name of the correspondent, subject description, date sent or received, 'attch', and an indication of the number of attachments](#)

13. [File names of recurring events should include the date and a description of the event](#)

14. [Order the components in a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the document](#)

The naming conventions explained

1. Use alpha and numeric characters only

- Use letters (A to Z, a to z) and numbers (0 to 9) only.

- Restricting characters in file names to alpha and numeric characters makes file names easy to read and remember.

- Spaces and some non-alphanumeric characters such as parentheses, brackets, quotes, apostrophes, full stops, slashes and ampersands can confuse computers as well as humans.

2. File names should be unique

- Giving the same name to more than one document in the same folder could lead to the inadvertent deletion of another document in that folder.

3. File names should be clear and concise

- File names should contain just enough information to clearly describe the contents of the document.

- Short files names are easier to remember than long file names.

- Use standard abbreviations, e.g. "Cttee" instead of "Committee", "Rcvd" for "received" and "Attch" for "attachment".

- Avoid abbreviations, acronyms, codes, etc. that are not commonly understood e.g. BMS can refer to both the Bute Medical School and to the School of Chemistry's Centre for Biomolecular Sciences.

  Example:

  NamingConventions   instead of   The_ABC_guidance_on_naming_conventions

4. Demarcate words with CapitalLetters

- To avoid unnecessarily lengthening file names demarcate words with capital letters instead of spaces, underscores or hyphens

- Using capital letters to demarcate the words of a file name means that the file name is still readily recognisable.

- Capitalise acronyms.

  Example:

  AnnualReport2007   instead of   Annual_Report_2007

5. Avoid repetition and redundancy

- Repetition and redundancy increases the length of file names.

- Unless you intend to relocate or email documents, file names should not usually include the title(s) of the parent folder(s) in which the document will be filed. Location details will be available in the directory display.

- Words such as "a", "and', "of", "the" and "to" should not be used unless they contribute to the meaning of the file name.

- File names should not include terms such as "Pdf", "Presentation" or "Spreadsheet". This information is redundant as the type of file will be obvious from the file icon and the file extension.

- Information such as the name of the document's creator and date of creation will be captured as metadata by the application used to create the document and there is no need to repeat it.

  Example:

  NamingConventions   instead of
  Pdf_records_management_guidance_on_naming_conventions_for_electronic_documents 6_June_2007_E_Longate

6. Gives dates back to front

- Dates and times should follow the BS ISO 8601:2004 basic format:
    o YYYY   Year
    o YYYYMM   Year and month
    o YYYYMMDD   Year, month and day
    o hhmmss   Hours, minutes and seconds

- To cover a period of years use YYYY-YYYY. The basic format used the separator "/" but this symbol will not be accepted in a Windows file name. The use in this case of a hyphen is the only time that such is recommended in these guidelines.

- In following the basic format everyone will be able to tell that 20071207 means 7 December 2007 and not 12 July 2007.

- Documents with files names beginning with dates given as above will sort in numerical and thus chronological order. The most recent document will be at the end of the list and this will help in the identification and retrieval of documents and misnaming will be easy to see.

- Use the version of the date that is most appropriate to your document e.g. YYYYMMDD for minutes of meetings and YYYY-YYYY to cover an academic year.

- The date concerned is a significant date relevant to the document e.g. date sent or meeting date. It is not the system-generated date that the software automatically assigns when a document is created or updates each time a document is saved.

- Months entered alphabetically do not file in chronological order.

  Examples:

  20070606Minutes   instead of   June62007Minutes
  200708Invoices   instead of   August2007Invoices

7. Use two-digit numbers (unless a date or a number with more than two digits)

- Maintain numeric order when file names contain numbers by including a leading 0 for all numbers 0 to 9 (and if necessary for 10 to 99).

- The most recent document will be at the end of the list of documents and this will help in the identification and retrieval of documents and misnaming will be obvious.

- Example:

NamingConventionsV01	instead of	NamingConventionsV09
…		NamingConventionsV1
NamingConventionsV09		NamingConventionsV10
NamingConventionsV10		…
NamingConventionsV11		NamingConventionsV11

8. Family name then initials

- Give personal names by family name first then initials.

- It is most likely that documents concerning individuals will be retrieved by family name of the individual. The documents will be in alphabetical order and this will help in identification.

- It may be appropriate to include names of individuals in a file name when the document is a piece of correspondence.

- It will not usually be appropriate to include in the file name the name or the initials of or to identify the document owner or creator as file names should outlast the document's creator or owner.

- Rank and title can in most cases be ignored and not included in the file name. If including either, place them after the last initial.

- Avoid repetition and redundancy. There is usually no need to include components in the file name that are also in the folder name to which the document belongs.

    Example:

BatesN		EBennet
BennetE	instead of	NBates
JoadT		PTook
TookP		TJoad

9. Link segmented documents

- Link documents where the component parts are stored separately by including 'Part', 'Chapter', etc. and component number in the file name

    Example:

    ManagingRecordsPart01
    ManagingRecordsPart02

10. Include version number and, where appropriate, 'Draft' or 'Final'

- When documents go through a number of draft and final versions and previous versions are to be retained it is important to be able to distinguish between versions by giving each their own number.

- Where a version number is appropriate, it should always appear in the file name so that the most recent version can be easily identified and retrieved.

- The version number of a document should be indicated in its file name by the inclusion of 'V' followed by the two digit version number and, where appropriate, 'Draft' or 'Final'.

- See Version Control available at www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/VersionControlV01.pdf

  Example:

  NamingConventionsV03Draft
  NamingConventionsV01Final

11. File names of correspondence should include the name of the correspondent, subject description, date sent or received, and if received, 'Rcvd'

- It will usually be appropriate to order the components in the order above as it is likely that correspondence will be retrieved by family name of the correspondent.

- Including 'Rcvd' will make it easy to identify incoming correspondence.

- Include the time of receipt when more than one email is received from the same correspondent on the same subject and on the same day.

- Avoid repetition and redundancy. There is no need to include components in the file name that are also in the folder name to which the document belongs.

  Example:

  ClausSGifts20061225Rcvd

12. File names of attachments should include the name of the correspondent, subject description, date sent or received, 'Attch', and the number of the attachment

- It will usually be appropriate to order the components in the order above as it is likely that you will need to link the attachment to the correspondence it accompanied.

- Including 'Attch' will make it easy to identify attachments.

- Include the number of the attachment when there is more than one, including a leading '0' if necessary.

- Avoid repetition and redundancy. There is usually no need to include components in the file name that are also in the folder name to which the document belongs.

  Example:

  HookJClock20050312Attch01
  HookJClock20050312Attch02

13. File names of recurring events should include the date and the name of the event

- File names relating to recurring events (e.g. meetings, monthly reports) should include the date and the event name or event description.

- Date first will usually be appropriate for events that are frequent and regularly recurring as it is most likely that documents will be retrieved by date.

- Event first will usually be appropriate for events that are infrequent but recurring as it is most likely that documents will be retrieved by event.

- Avoid repetition and redundancy. There is usually no need to include components in the file name that are also in the folder name to which the document belongs.

  Examples:

20070606Minutes	instead of	June62007Minutes
Induction2007	instead of	2007Induction

14. List the components of a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the document

- The components you include in a file name should be ordered according to the way in which the document will be retrieved and this will depend on the way you work.

- Where documents are retrieved according to their date the date component should appear first.

- Where documents are to be retrieved according to their description the description component should appear first.

What help is available?

For further help contact:

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